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## MEMORANDUM

To: Bill Waller, City of La Crescent

Linda Larson, Gunderson Health

Don Smith, City of La Crescent Planning Commission

From: Rose Ryan, AICP, Alta Planning + Design

Jimmy Shoemaker, Alta Planning + Design

Date: July 13, 2017

Re: **La Crosse Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update: Summary of Existing Conditions**

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### Introduction

As part of the update to the 2013 La Crescent Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, this memo summarizes existing conditions and planned developments and improvements that may affect bicycling and walking in La Crescent. The City is motivated to improve conditions for these modes; the City's 2016 Comprehensive Plan discusses importance of biking and walking to the livability of La Crescent.

The first section of this memo summarizes the 2016 Comprehensive Plan as it relates to walking and bicycling. This plan serves as a shared vision for the community and will help shape growth in all areas of La Crescent, including how visitors and residents travel to and from the City. The second section of the memo summarizes opportunities and challenges for walking and bicycling in La Crosse. The third section of the memo summarizes opportunities and challenges for walk and bike connections between La Crescent and La Crosse. An appendix to this memo includes notes from a May 18 site visit to La Crescent.

### 2016 La Crescent Comprehensive Plan

The 2016 La Crescent Comprehensive Plan acknowledges there is competition among cities to attract and retain residents and businesses. The Plan recognizes that investing in bicycle and pedestrian facilities is part of providing an attractive place for people. Indeed, *health and safety as a priority* is part of the Plan's Seven Essential Themes:

**Number 5: Health and safety as a priority** - *attention to health and safety in all projects and decisions, including continued investments in bicycle and pedestrian facilities.*

With more attention planned for bicycling and walking facilities, the City hopes to improve the mode share of people walking and bicycling to work. Currently, zero percent of residents bike to work, while 1.8 percent walk. Improvements to the bicycling and walking environment would encourage more people to try these non-motorized modes. In fact, 47 percent of respondents to a community survey as part of the planning process said that more/better bike and walking facilities would make them more likely to bike and walk. Respondents to the survey also said that additional bike and walk improvements are needed to improve safety for and promote awareness of people biking and walking.

In the Goals, Objectives, Strategies section of the Plan, bicycling and walking is mentioned several times:

**Number 15:** *The City will work to improve walkability, lighting, streets and sidewalks...sidewalks should continue to be required on both sides of all new residential streets. Easements for walking and biking trails should be secured to link new housing and park developments. Unconnected residential development (i.e. no pedestrian or bicycle facility connections to the rest of the community) is strongly discouraged.*

**Number 17:** *Residential development, especially multi-family and senior living developments should be located in areas where there is safe pedestrian and bicycle access to park, retail and community facilities.*

These goals hope to be achieved through expansion of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The 2012 Park and Recreation Plan was included in the Comprehensive Plan, showing future trails planned for La Crescent. (see Figure 1). Notice the trails proposed on 3<sup>rd</sup>, U.S. 14, and U.S. 14/61.



**Figure 1.** Existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities, as identified by the 2012 Parks and Recreation Plan.

Overall, the 2016 Comprehensive Plan highlights the desire by both City officials and the public for increased safety and connections for people biking and walking. The Plan will serve to guide and prioritize biking and walking for recreation and transportation in future planning in La Crescent. The Plan includes many suggestions for expanding the walk and bike network, trailheads, and other amenities. These improvements will improve the quality of life and competitiveness of La Crescent.

## Opportunities and Challenges for Walking and Biking

With guidance from the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, The City of La Crescent continues to identify needed improvements to biking and walking infrastructure. In May of 2017, the consultant team met with local planners, engineers, and city officials to discuss upcoming projects along Highway 6 (Houston County owned), Highway 25 (Houston County owned), 7th Street (La Crescent owned), and 3rd Street (La Crescent owned). The following highlights the information related to these corridors gathered from the May visit. An interactive map summarizing these projects can be found at this [link](#).

### Highway 6

As La Crescent continues to grow to the west, it will be critical to make safe and comfortable connections from this area of more rural land uses to the downtown, more urbanized city core. Highway 6, which becomes 7th Street east of Highway 25, connects La Crescent to the unincorporated portions of Houston County to the west. See Figure 2 below. Recently, the City of La Crescent annexed land west of Highway 25 along Highway 6 immediately south of Wiesner Memorial Park. It is in the process of extending sewer and water utilities to support the development of a 100-home subdivision.

While the type of improvement has not yet been confirmed, the City has prioritized making safe connections from the subdivision to the City's core for people biking and walking. Highway 6 carries relatively high traffic volumes, with some truck traffic, and potential improvements along the corridor should consider this when thinking about safety. Houston County and City staff have considered two options for this bike and walk connection: an on-street striped bike lane or a shared use path on the south side of the street.

A shared use path along Highway 6 would provide a more protected facility for people biking and walking than an on-street bike lane. However, there are some obstacles to constructing this off-road path. Residential driveways on the south side of Highway 6 become more frequent approaching town. Installing a shared use path would take coordination with residents in order to obtain right of way. In addition, just west of Highway 25, the right of way is limited on the south side of Highway 6 by Crucifixion Cemetery and a large electrical cable tower. Additional planning and engineering will be required to develop a path would fit in this narrow and restricted space.

An on-street striped bike lane would likely be easier to implement because of the width of the roadway. At roughly 40 feet wide, there is plenty of roadway space to maintain two vehicle travel lanes and two bicycle travel lanes. Furthermore, City and County staff have indicated that on street parking is not much of a factor along Highway 6 in this area. Even with enough right of way to accommodate both bikes and vehicles, there is a question of how an on-street bike lane would serve pedestrians like an off-street shared use path. Off-street shared use paths are generally more comfortable for people than on-street bike lanes.



**Figure 2.** Looking east towards La Crescent on Hwy 6, west of Hwy 25

## Highway 25

For both an off street shared use path and an on-street bike lane on Highway 6, County and City engineers and planners have identified the need for improvements at the intersection with Highway 25. Highway 25 approaches Highway 6 at an angle from the south, causing difficult sightlines for drivers that aren't conducive to pedestrian and bicyclist safety. In the future, there may be an opportunity to square up the two roadways, so Highway 25 approaches at an angle that makes it easier for people walking, biking, and driving to see each other. The curb radii at the intersection is large, leading to observed wide and sweeping turns by vehicles turning onto and off of Highway 6. Tightening up the cross section and curb radii of this intersection would serve to reduce speeds of turning cars. See Figure 3 below.





**Figure 3.** *Intersection of Hwy 6 and Hwy 25, looking east towards downtown La Crescent.*

To protect people biking and walking at this intersection, County and City staff have considered a median on Highway 25, which would give users of a shared use path along Highway 6 an improved crossing. Local staff have also considered using traffic calming at this intersection to create a “gateway” to La Crescent. This would not only increase safety, but also welcome people to the urbanized core of the city.

Further south of the intersection of Highway 25 and Highway 6 is Skunk Hollow Road. There are no sidewalks or bike facilities along this segment of Highway 25 (see Figure 4). La Crescent staff have identified this connection as important; it connects Highway 25 to two parks and a playground, the ice arena, La Crescent High School, and multifamily housing. Local staff have considered sidewalks on one side of Highway 25. They have also identified the connection east of Highway 25 on Skunk Hollow Road to 12th Street, to Lancer Boulevard, to 11th Street to Spruce Drive as a focus area for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Along this route east of Highway 25, sidewalks are missing on both or one side of streets. Spruce Drive connects this area to 7th Street, where Kistler Park and the City Aquatic Center and Swimming Pool are located.



**Figure 4.** Hwy 25 south of Hwy 6, north of Skunk Hollow Road.

## 7th Street

East of Highway 25, Highway 6 becomes 7th Street as it approaches downtown La Crescent. The City Aquatic Center and Swimming Pool sits at the three-way intersection of 7th Street and Spruce Drive, where local planners and engineers have identified the crossing of 7th Street as a barrier. Currently, the crosswalk connecting the north and south sides of 7th Street terminates on the north side of 7th right at the driveway apron to the Aquatic Center parking lot. Because of this, conflicts exist between exiting traffic and pedestrians. Bicyclists coming to the pool from the east often ride on the sidewalk of 7th Street, and cross wherever gaps in traffic exist. The City and County agree that crossing improvements are needed to address safety and access issues near the Aquatic Center and Swimming Pool.

Further east, 7th Street meets Elm Street. Elm Street currently has an on-street bike lane running north-south through town, from 11th Street to the north past city limits on Ridge Road.

## South 3rd Street

Because of its connection to U.S. 14/61 across the Mississippi River and into Wisconsin, 3rd Street is a major connection for both motorized and non-motorized traffic. West of Elm Street, 3rd Street is more of a neighborhood street, with a right of way not exceeding 45 feet. On the segment of 3rd Street east of Elm Street, the right of way increases to 50 feet and traffic volumes are high. While there are sidewalks on both



sides of the street, plus crosswalk signage and striping, traffic can often be fast moving on the four-lane road, making for an unpleasant walking environment. Because of its close proximity to Highway 14/61, the City plans to install an RRFB on the west crossing of 3rd Street, at Oak Street. There are no bicycle facilities on 3rd Street. See Figures 5 and 6.



**Figure 5.** Crossing of 3rd Street at Oak Street





**Figure 6.** A pedestrian crossing featuring a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB). High intensity flashing lights are activated by a pedestrian needing to cross.

At the intersection of 3rd Street and U.S. 14/61, the roadway opens up even more, adding turn lanes and creating very long crossing distances for people biking and walking. While there are medians, they can be narrow and uncomfortable for people waiting to cross.

## Existing Connections to La Crosse

Because of its proximity to La Crosse, Wisconsin, the Mississippi River is crossed frequently by residents of both cities throughout the day. Many La Crescent residents work in La Crosse. At a distance of 3 miles, biking from La Crescent to La Crosse would take about 15 minutes. Because of this, it is important to consider safe and comfortable crossings for people biking and walking. This section will discuss the existing crossings between La Crosse and La Crescent. The information below is taken from discussions with City and County staff, and a visit to La Crescent in May of 2017.

### I-90 Dresbach Bridge

Interstate 90 crosses the Mississippi River north of La Crescent, connecting Minnesota and Wisconsin. Planning for the replacement of the nearly three-mile bridge began in 2007 and included a feasibility study for the possibility of a bicycle and pedestrian facility. Although the facility was not included in the construction completed in October 2016, features of the bridge were added so as to not preclude a facility

in the future. Continued planning will be required to allow a safe and comfortable connection to a future facility on the bridge, which lies over two miles north of downtown La Crescent.

## U.S. 14 Connection to La Crosse

U.S. Highway 14 provides another crossing of the Mississippi River east of downtown La Crescent via the West Channel Bridge. For cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians, this is the most direct connection to La Crosse, Wisconsin. As a person walking or biking approaches the West Channel Bridge on U.S. 14, there is a shoulder alongside car traffic, with some segments of sidewalk. Often, this shoulder is interrupted by turn lanes (see Figures 7 and 8). On the Bridge itself, there is a shoulder and a narrow sidewalk.



**Figure 7.** US 14 connection to West Channel Bridge

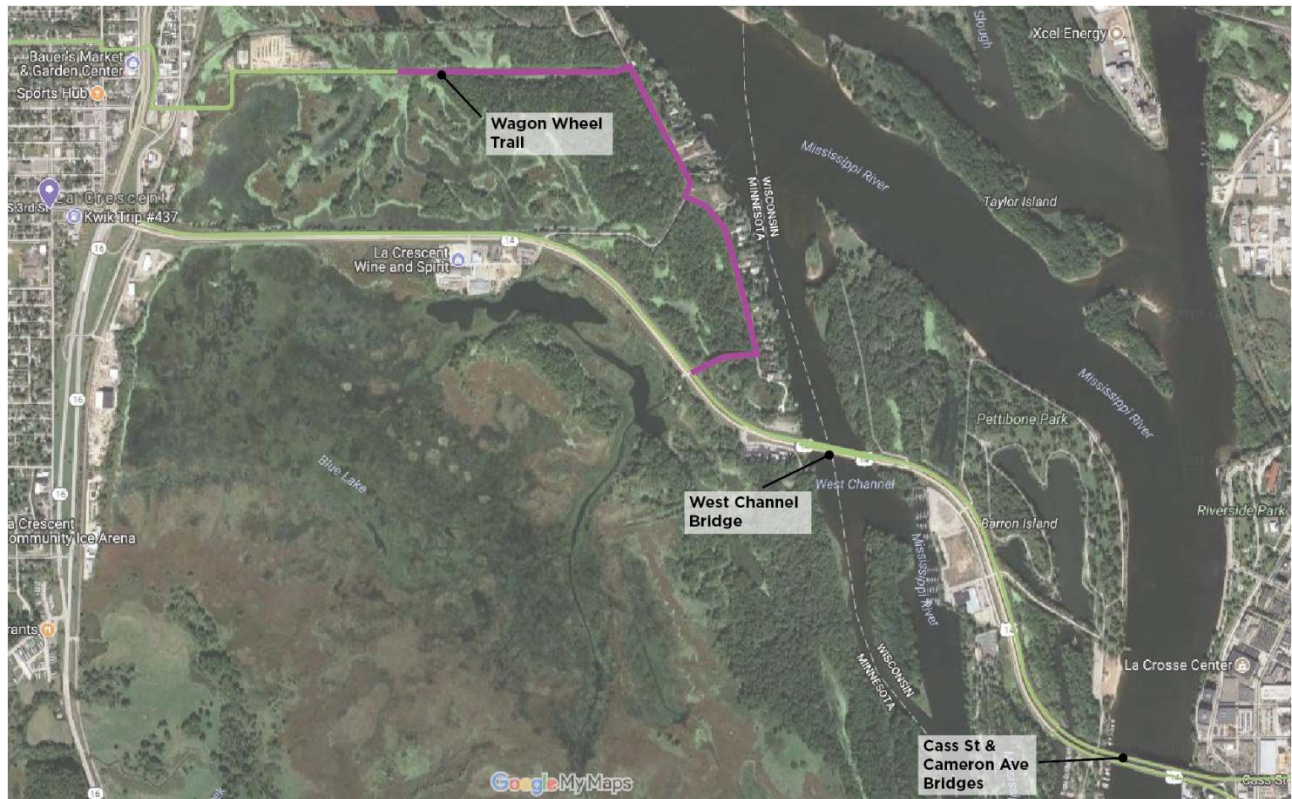


**Figure 8.** Sidewalk along US 14, with shoulder interrupted by turn lane

## Wagon Wheel Trail

The Wagon Wheel Trail is an alternate route that bypasses approximately 1.3 miles of U.S. 14. From the north side of downtown, people biking and walking can cross U.S. 14 at N 2nd Street and head south to Main St along Chestnut Street. However, this crossing is difficult; the intersection is unsignalized and traffic speeds are high. Main Street heads west paralleling U.S. 14 until it dead ends to car traffic. Here, people biking and walking can continue on the Wagon Wheel Trail that heads directly west to Shore Acres Road. Paralleling the River, Shore Acres Road heads south. Bicyclists and pedestrians can continue to DNR Landing Road and connect with U.S. 14 just west of the River, thereby avoiding a large part of U.S. 14 immediately out of La Crescent. See Figure 9. Though this route is likely more comfortable for people biking and walking, it adds mileage to the route, and is only accessible from the north side of downtown.





**Figure 9.** Routes and bridges connecting La Crescent to La Crosse, WI.

## Cameron Avenue Bridge

Immediately west of La Crosse, on the Wisconsin side of the River, the Cass Street and Cameron Avenue bridges leave and enter downtown, as part of U.S. 14. Cameron Avenue serves eastbound traffic entering La Crosse. Between the fencing on the outside of the bridge and a jersey barrier, there is an eight-foot wide sidewalk, making the space feel narrower than it is for people walking and biking (see Figure 10). On the other side of the jersey barrier, alongside traffic, there is an eight-foot wide shoulder.



**Figure 10.** *Sidewalk and shoulder on Cameron Avenue Bridge*

## Cass Street Bridge

Cass Street serves westbound traffic leaving La Crosse. This bridge has five-foot wide sidewalks on both sides. This width makes biking uncomfortable, and passing between oncoming people difficult. Outside the jersey barrier, there is a five-foot wide shoulder alongside the two travel lanes (see Figure 11)



**Figure 11.** *Narrow sidewalk and shoulder on Cass Street Bridge*



# Appendix: Notes from May 18, 2017 Site Visit

## La Crescent Bike Plan Update

### Project Initiation Meetings

In Attendance:

Linda Larson

Tim Hruska

Don Smith

Bill Waller

Tim Gustafson (Alta)

Rose Ryan (Alta)

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### 12:30 PM Meeting

- Rose: Distributed scope, schedule, and today's desired outcomes
  - o Task 1: Documenting existing conditions, namely HWY 6, HWY 25, 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South
  - o Based on Don's comments, emphasis will be about the Cass and Cameron Street bridges, not the Clinton Street bridge (entirely within La Crosse, so not a priority for La Crescent)
  - o Mississippi River Bridges will be the focus
  - o Wagon Wheel Trail
  - o Task 2: Recommendations:
    - Preliminary recommendations at focus areas
    - The primary connection between La Crosse and La Crescent is via the Cass & Cameron Street Bridges
    - Set up a workshop and tour / bike ride
  - o Task 3: Draft Plan
    - Update map that was prepared in Task 2
    - Two (2) cross-sections for up to three (3) corridors
  - o Task 4: Priorities and Final Plan
    - Will need to incorporate into the overall Bike Plan – must be current and complete
    - Validate the existing map and bring it up to current status
    - Finalize work, make last round of updates, return GIS files (Tim uses CAD and GIS, so this should be pretty seamless)
  - o Changes to scope as it is attached to contract
    - Connections to La Crosse to emphasize La Crescent's facilities
    - Delivery of final plan docs will be editable

- Don: today's plan is to review the sites in person prior to the County and MnDOT meeting
  - o Meeting with DOT; discuss North 4<sup>th</sup> St traffic signal potential
  - o Meeting with County; discuss downtown planning process & entrance and exits to downtown in terms of bike, ped, and auto access
  - o Want to show 3<sup>rd</sup> Street South entrance to City; difficult to navigate
  - o MnDOT planner is relatively new; wish to discuss reverse-angle parking
  - o Interested in discussing how to improve the planning process to include the City earlier and more often

## 2:30 PM Meeting

In Attendance:

All from above PLUS

Andrew Andrusko (MnDOT)

Cherryl Josted (La Crescent resident, bike ped committee)

Brian Pogodzinski (Houston County Engineer)

Meeting objective: to meet with MnDOT and the County about pending annexations and the potential bicycle and pedestrian improvements that could be incorporated in such annexation

- Obtain data and/or plans
- Share contact information
- Share your preferences, guidelines, policies, and standards

Current understanding:

- The City has annexed land on HWY 6 and is in the process of doing design for extension of sewer and water to support the development of a 100-home subdivision
  - o Interested in maintaining a sense of connectivity to the rest of La Crescent through infrastructure
  - o Potential improvements include:
    - Shared use path on south side of roadway
    - Median refuge island to calm traffic at the 7<sup>th</sup> Street (County Road 6) & 25 intersection
    - Bike lanes on street
    - Branding and wayfinding signage
    - Gateway treatment
  - o Other planned improvements that would connect:
    - Wieser Park & HWY 25
    - Skunk Hollow Road – bike lanes and a sidewalk
    - Connection to pool
- Brian:
  - o No plans to do work on County 6 within City limits in the near term
  - o County 6 from Town Hall Road to Wieser Park is planned for improvement in 2020
  - o County 29 to be resurfaced from South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in 2019
  - o In Minnesota on County Highways, speed limits are set by MnDOT
    - Speed study done in 2010 on County 6, the point at which it was signed at 40
    - Determination of 30, 40 and 55 postings are set by the state, as well
  - o MnDOT & County engineers have met to sync lane widths, parking lanes, bike lanes, guidelines for when to include
    - Showed us a draft design guidelines table



- Likely to be approved by Fall 2017
- County 6 ADT: 3,700 outside of town up to 8,000 @ South 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - At Elm Street, south of 3<sup>rd</sup> ADT: 6,500-7,500
  - Near the pool: 5,400
  - Near County 25: 3,700
- Based on draft design chart
  - Min design standards are nearly identical in the 1,000 – 2,500 and 2,500 – 10,000 ADT ranges, so increases in volume likely won't change much
  - Because County 6 carries truck traffic the County Engineer's preference is to allow them to use the curb area where on-street parking rarely occurs
  - By striping parking and a bike lane, the design encourages bicyclists to travel in closer proximity to truck traffic
  - Shared use path preferred width: 10' typical, possibly down to 8' where it's tight
    - County engineer prefers something wider than 5'
  - Is the County open to narrowing the roadway and/or removing parking from one or more sides of the street?
    - Not opposed to the idea, but prefer to wait until reconstruction is necessary (~15 years from now) before narrowing the roadway
    - Don't want to reduce travel options into town
  - County 25: sidewalks on west side of street? Possibly
    - Tim suggested a sidewalk on the east side to concentrate crossing activity between 6, 25, and Skunk Hollow
  - County doesn't issue heavy truck permits on 25 due to structural concerns – instead encourages other routes
  - County thoughts on putting a median on 25 to narrow the crossing?
    - Take up space? Can a median be added without moving curb line? Unlikely.
  - Thoughts on squaring up the intersection upon reconstruction?
    - Could calm traffic, shorten the crossing distance
  - Crossing improvements at County 6 @ the pool
    - Want to avoid conflict near the pool driveway
    - Currently, people on bikes come down the hill and cross where there is a gap in traffic, rather than crossing at crosswalks
    - Most bicyclists are approaching the pool on the sidewalk. When they see a gap, they enter the street and cross where it feels convenient
    - Need to place the crossing to the pool in the most logical and safest spot
    - Could remove parking from one side, add bike lanes on both sides, keep a 30 mph speed limit
    - Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) planned for the intersection of South 3<sup>rd</sup> and Oak, one block from South 3<sup>rd</sup> and 14/61
      - Will be installed on the west leg
      - Consider one at a convenient location near the pool
  - Alternatives for bike lanes on Elm Street – perhaps improvements to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street from Elm to Hill
  - Narrow the road but allow bikes to get to the pool without using Elm
    - Shared roadway
    - Stripe the parking lane
    - Pull in the curbs, add sidewalks

- Downtown Planning Discussion
  - Moving City Hall to the Oak/Main intersection as a display of investment in the downtown
  - How this would affect our thoughts on bump outs, road diets, removing parking from one side of the road
- How to bicyclists travel east into La Crosse? Some of them stay on the same side of the street for eastbound and westbound travel so as to avoid any free-flow right turn lanes – turns over the conversation to MnDOT
- MnDOT has no plans to change existing infrastructure, wanted to know what the City is proposing
  - The City isn't proposing anything, but rather is wanting to learn what is feasible
  - Objectives:
    - Get commuters to/from La Crosse via the bridge
    - Make connections to the Wagon Wheel Trail
    - Make crossing to/from La Crosse more comfortable for non-commuters (e.g. recreation riders, families, children)
    - Get from Elm into the transition towards La Crosse
  - Related: MPO has spent 4+ meetings to reduce parking demand in downtown La Crosse
    - Several cities have presented ideas to address this
    - One of the potential ways to improve this is to improve bicycle access
- Andrew: Let's start at the Racetrack Development – how does the City see this development opportunity as the kind that was described?
  - Don & Tim: It's the only remaining parcel available for development
- Andrew inquired about the basis for the City's interest in attracting a dual-income household with kids.
  - Don: The City will do a housing demand analysis before moving on the option to annex. The current Comprehensive Plan provides a vision for this type of development, and the developer has expressed support to help implement this vision (2050 plan for the region calls for reduction of number of roads, reduction of the expansion of roadways, etc.).
- Other development scenarios:
  - Seniors who are less interested in bicycling
- Andrew: concerned over the causality of this proposal – would be interested in a more data-driven approach to justify the need for roadway improvements to accommodate bicycling
- Don: executive housing lots up on the hill have yet to reach capacity, so a senior demographic doesn't seem as likely as the one that is proposed
- Brian: The County is hesitant to do any roadway improvements due to concerns that ADT may increase in any way above the current level of 8,700
  - Does the City want to put bicyclists on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, or would it be more desirable to put them on Oak or Walnut?
  - Brian: would adding bike lanes to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street at 14/61 make commuters use them? Are bike lanes on 3<sup>rd</sup> intended for commuters or families

- Don: Interested in keeping downtown contiguous, but also while allowing access into it
- Brian: I can see a future scenario of signaling 3<sup>rd</sup>/Elm and restricting turns at Oak/Elm
- Don: Downtown plan also identifies North 4<sup>th</sup> and the Highway as a commercial node for a potential grocery store (highway visibility is desirable)
- Andrew: I don't signalization of the 4<sup>th</sup>/Highway as a good location due to geometric design constraints or traffic volume warrants, but have no comments on the proposed land use
  - Don: Mark was more supportive of its likelihood of meeting the warrant – also, commercial developers aren't interested in development there unless it had easy access and high capacity
  - Andrew: We can revisit this if the City wanted to do a traffic study to see if it meets the warrant
  - Linda: will the traffic study include crash analysis, bicycle and pedestrian traffic?
  - Andrew: It will be an engineering document that covers those items and make a recommendation on proposed alternatives
  - Linda: Has one been done?
  - Andrew: No. And the Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE) or Traffic Impact Study (TIS) may show that it meets a warrant for a signal, but other factors (like the fact that it is a US Highway whose objective is to serve regional travel) might also be a factor that complicates the ability to do what is in the interest of economic development.
- Tim: One key issue is that 3<sup>rd</sup> Street currently serves all modes and needs to do this in a better manner than it does currently
- Andrew: To paraphrase – so long as the existing condition serves everything as it now does, we have an interest in maintaining those points of access
- Tim & Don: We have many points of entry, but only one point of exit
- Brian: Has MnDOT looked at travel speeds on 14/61 north through town?
- Andrew: The City can request, but not sure it would help the City meet its objectives
- Brian ADT:
  - US HWY 14/61 - 17,000 north of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
  - US HWY 14/61 - 13,500 south of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
- County is willing to make changes on S 7<sup>th</sup>, if want to add bike lanes and limit to one side parking.